



DISPUTABLE MATTERS

**ROMANS 14: 1-4
NIV & MSG**

***A Sermon BY
Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley***

**NOVEMBER
3RD**

11AM



Date: November 3, 2024,
Preacher: Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley
Sermon Title: *Disputable Matters*
Scripture: Romans 14:1-4 (NIV)

(NIV) ¹Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ²One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

(MSG) Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.

²⁻⁴For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume he should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.

SERMON SUMMARY

With two days until what could be a historic election, Pastor Wesley opened his sermon, "Disputable Matters," by reminding us, "My job is not to make you think what I think. My job is to make sure you're thinking." Acknowledging the mental, emotional, and spiritual toll this election season has taken on many of us, Pastor Wesley admitted that he, too, is feeling anxious and angry as Tuesday approaches.

While examining his anger, Pastor Wesley was led to Romans 14:1-4. He explained that Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome to address an exigent issue—the role of Jewish law in Christianity. This issue had been a long-standing debate between Paul and Peter that influenced and impacted the early church. On one side were Jewish Christians, who, following Peter, believed that Christianity was an extension of Judaism and required adherence to Mosaic law. On the other were Gentile Christians aligned with Paul, who believed that, under Jesus, a new covenant had freed them from these laws.

Essentially, conservative Jewish Christians (on the *right*) emphasized dietary restrictions, circumcision, and Sabbath observance, while the more liberal Gentile Christians (on the *left*) believed these were unnecessary. Pastor Wesley explained that the conflict stemmed from the self-righteous nature of each side who tried to impose their view of Christianity on the other. He warned that self-righteousness leads to self-idolatry, where one's beliefs are equated with God's will. Just as this divisive spirit affected the early church, if we do not address these disputable matters, it will continue to be a pervasive evil in our churches and political climate today.

Pastor Wesley identified how one of the greatest deceptions in Christianity is the insistence of homogeneity. He advised that when we demand that everyone believe and think alike, we ultimately create division within the body of Christ. He emphasized the richness that comes from diversity of thought, and how understanding others can deepen our collective understanding of God.

He then asked a central question for Christians, “Does this look like Jesus?” Rather than simply asking what the bible says, we should consider whether our words and actions emulate and reflect Jesus’ character.

As his sermon closed, Pastor Wesley reminded us that Paul warned the Roman church about the dangers of dwelling on disputable matters. His advice for us is the same. Even when we disagree with others on politics or beliefs, we are called to accept them, recognizing that each person has a unique journey that has led them to where they are. The greatest defeat on Tuesday, he said, will not be if our candidate loses, but if we allow anger and judgment to govern us.

Pastor Wesley invited us to read Romans 14:1-4 in *The Message* translation, which reminds us that all are welcome at Christ’s table, and it is not our place to disregard those God welcomes. As the final line of verse 4 reads, “If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.” Ultimately, Pastor Wesley challenged us to embrace this perspective, honor God, and strive to embody the actions of Jesus as we approach Tuesday and beyond.

KEY POINTS

1. In Romans 14, Paul gives a theological treatise on how the Christian movement in Rome should live out their salvation in Jesus Christ.
2. Paul and Peter often disagreed on one key issue—the Roman relationship of Jewish law in Christianity.
3. Privilege is often resistant to the presence of those who our society often deems as “other.”
4. The root of Paul’s and Peter’s disagreement was that each tried to impose their understanding of what it means to be a Christian onto the other.
5. One of the most dangerous, destructive, and undiagnosed issues in Christianity is self-righteousness.
6. The disease of self-righteousness and the virus of self-idolatry require the vaccination of opinion.
7. The Greek word for “disputable matters” in Romans 14:1 is *dialogismos*, which translates as “opinions.” In essence, this verse says the argument is centered on opinions.
8. One of Christianity’s greatest deceptions is the insistence on homogeneity (believing, seeing, thinking, and loving in the same way).
9. The primary question of Christianity is not, “What does the Bible say?” The primary question of Christianity is, “Does this look like Jesus?”
10. God led Pastor Wesley to Romans 14 because the greatest defeat on Tuesday will not be if our candidate doesn’t win; it will be if our anger does.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

1. Pastor Wesley shared an illustration about one of his favorite movies, *Malcolm X*, directed by Spike Lee. Denzel Washington was cast because he looked, walked, and talked like Malcolm X, in addition to being a good actor. If you could pick someone to portray you in a movie—someone who resembles you and captures your essence—who would you choose and why?

2. In the sermon, the importance of reflecting on Jesus' character in our actions and words was highlighted. If you could have dinner with Jesus and ask him one question about handling today's world and its challenges, what would you ask and why?

INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Pastor Wesley preached on the dangers of self-righteousness and self-idolatry, suggesting that we need a "vaccination from opinions" to combat these issues. In [Micah 6:8](#), we are called to walk humbly with God. What does it mean to *walk humbly* when interpreting and dividing the Word of God to "vaccinate opinions?" How does that humility help us avoid self-righteous talk against other believers?
2. After reflecting on Pastor Wesley's question, "What does Jesus look like?" and considering these texts ([John 8:3-18](#), [John 10:11](#), [Hebrews 4:15](#), and [John 13:34-35](#)), how can we embody the image of Jesus Christ in our society when having conversations about scripture with Christian nationalists, MAGA Republicans, and Democrats?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. James Baldwin famously said, "We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist." In light of the sermon's call to accept others even when we disagree, how do we navigate showing love and acceptance when someone's beliefs or actions infringe upon basic human rights or dignity?
2. Many of our Village sessions will meet after Election Day this week. Whether it is before or after, how did Pastor Wesley's message change how you did or will respond to Wednesday?

3. Paul's call to accept others without judgment suggests that we should value the diversity within the body of Christ. How can diverse experiences and perspectives help us gain a fuller understanding of God? Have you experienced a time when a different perspective led to a better outcome or deeper insight?

4. We are reminded by today's sermon that everyone can attempt to justify their opinions by attaching scripture. We were also reminded of the danger of this practice when the opinions are rooted in hatred. Has the misuse of scripture to bolster an argument been detrimental to your Christian walk?

5. The sermon began with Pastor Wesley speaking of the toll of the election season on our mental and spiritual well-being and expressing how it has prompted him to step away from the news and social media. How can we, as Christians, find peace amid political and social turmoil? What practices have you found helpful in staying grounded?

6. Pastor Wesley challenged us by highlighting the many versions of Christianity throughout history—such as the Christianity of colonizers, slave traders, or misogynists—that have deviated from Jesus' message of love, justice, and humility. When we examine the version of Christianity we follow, how does it align with what Jesus taught and demonstrated in his life? Are there areas where our beliefs or practices may conflict with Jesus' example of compassion, justice, and inclusion?

7. Some institutions do not allow space for difference. Pastor Wesley shared that his ban from the National Baptist Convention is a result of his stance on women's legitimate call to preach. Are you willing to separate yourself from associations where disputable matters foster self-righteousness?

“CAN I PUSH IT?” QUESTIONS

1. Pastor Wesley made a simple yet powerful statement, “Accept them.” What practices, policies, and procedures must the church put in place to fully live out this statement? As individual members of the church, what role do we play in fostering acceptance?
2. Regardless of the election results, what is the responsibility of the church in healing our fractured nation? Is there anything the Church must first address internally before it can reunify communities outside its doors?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. In [Exodus 20:13](#), the commandment “thou shall not kill” is often used by pro-lifers to support the ban on abortion. What other biblical texts have been weaponized to advance political agendas? How can we approach these texts with a balanced and thoughtful interpretation to avoid becoming self-righteous in our handling of scripture?
2. The Roman church's conflict over Jewish law is mirrored in today's church as we navigate cultural and doctrinal differences. How can we, as a community, avoid falling into similar divisions over non-essential issues?
3. The concept of *disputable matters* suggests there are areas in faith that are open to interpretation. How have you navigated conversations about faith, identity, or parenting with those whose opinions contradict your core belief system?
4. Paul's teaching on unity emphasizes that we are all welcomed by God at Christ's table. For those of us who have felt excluded or judged, what does it mean to truly

believe that God has a place for each of us? How can we extend that same welcome and acceptance to others, including family members and children?

5. Prejudices can be perpetuated by the expectation of homogeneity. Does the example of Paul's *New Christianity* and Peter's *Old Christianity* resonate with any tensions within your family, friends, or colleagues? If so, how does Romans 14 prepare you to resolve this tension?

6. The sermon includes an example of Denzel Washington's dedication and the sacrifices made for his portrayal of Malcolm X, a role for which he was selected in part because he resembled Malcolm X. Are there any sacrifices you are reluctant to make to align your actions and words to more closely resemble Jesus?

INDIVIDUAL OR VILLAGE STUDY

SPIRIT WORK/ACTIVITY: *Made in the Image of Christ*

Read the following scriptures:

1. **Ephesians 2:8-9:** "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."
2. **Micah 6:8:** "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."
3. **Galatians 2:20:** "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
4. **Galatians 5:22-23:** (Fruit of the Spirit): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law."
5. **John 13:34-35:** "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*"

Activity

1. **Prayer of Reflection** Write a prayer asking God to reveal areas in your life where you may have been self-righteous or boastful about your opinions and not cultivating the character of Jesus.
2. **Meditate on Galatians 5:22-23** Reflect on these verses. Consider how the characteristics listed in the verses are gifts of the Holy Spirit and reflect Jesus' behavior.
3. **Reflect on the Fruit of the Spirit:** One Fruit of the Spirit is listed below for each of nine (9) days. For the next nine days, write about how you can cultivate the respective qualities in your life to embody the behavior of Jesus as you deal with difficult people.

Day 1: Love

Day 2: Joy

Day 3: Peace

Day 4: Forbearance (Patience)

Day 5: Kindness

Day 6: Goodness

Day 7: Faithfulness

Day 8: Gentleness

Day 9: Self-Control

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Video. The Bible Project: [Book of Romans Summary](#)

Reference. Learn more about [James Baldwin](#)